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Endowment Declines Continue, Survey Indicates

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A new survey from the Commonfund Institute on the investment performance of 235 education endowments found that the funds earned an average return of minus-24.1 percent in the six months ending December 31, 2008.

A report on the findings includes results from 118 private colleges, 67 public colleges, and 50 independent schools. The institutions of higher education fared only marginally better than the schools, with the private colleges reporting a return of minus-23.7 percent and the public colleges a return of minus-23.6 percent. The average return for schools in the survey was minus-25.1 percent.

The data were gathered in an online survey in January and February.

"It's bad news, absolutely," said John S. Griswold, executive director of the institute. "This is creating a lot of pain right now."

With the market plunges of the last few weeks, Mr. Griswold said, the decline since July 1 and the start of the 2009 fiscal year has no doubt grown. By now, "it's probably 30 percent," he said in an interview this week.

The latest report, part of the "2009 Commonfund Benchmarks Study Year-End Update," includes fewer institutions than the one Commonfund and the National Association of College and University Business Officers reported on in January. That report found that 435 colleges had seen an estimated loss of 22.9 percent on their endowments for the first five months of the 2009 fiscal year ([The Chronicle](#), February 6).